



## **Administrative Office of the Courts**

**Joseph E. Lambert**  
Chief Justice

100 Millcreek Park  
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601-9230  
p 502-573-2350 or 800-928-2350  
[www.kycourts.net](http://www.kycourts.net)

**Melinda L. Wheeler**  
Director

Contact: Leigh Anne Hiatt, APR, public information officer  
502-573-2350, x 4064, cell 502-545-2839, [lhiatt@kycourts.net](mailto:lhiatt@kycourts.net)

*For Immediate Release*

### **Letcher County to be a pilot site for new Truancy Diversion Program created by the Kentucky Court of Justice**

FRANKFORT, Ky., Feb. 22, 2006 — Beckham Bates Elementary School in Whitesburg has been designated as a pilot site for the new Truancy Diversion Pilot Program, which will eventually be available statewide. The Kentucky Court of Justice has announced the creation of a Truancy Diversion Program for students at risk of being charged with a truancy offense and referred to District Court or Family Court.

"We have already begun this important program for Kentucky's youth," said Twyla Messer, principal of Beckham Bates Elementary. "Our first group of participants convened on Jan. 20, 2006."

"Truancy is a complex problem," said Letcher County District Judge James T. Wood Jr., who will help oversee the Truancy Diversion Pilot Program in Letcher County. "This program brings together all parties: educators, law enforcement agencies, courts, communities and families. If we can reduce student absenteeism in its early stages, we can also help the student head off many of the negative social, legal and financial consequences that result from persistent absences."

Students who have missed the number of days allotted for a school period or who have too many unexcused absences are subject to being charged with a truancy offense, which could create a formal court record. Truancy is a status offense, which means it is an act that would not be criminal if committed by an adult.

The program uses a team approach to help students develop good attendance habits and improve their overall educational experience. The team is made up of judges, court designated workers, school counselors, principals, directors of pupil personnel and family resource staff.

The Court Designated Worker Program, under the direction of the Department of Juvenile Services of the Administrative Office of the Courts, will facilitate the Truancy Diversion Pilot Program. Court designated workers will hold weekly meetings with the

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parents and the student to review attendance records, behavior and grades, and develop a plan for success. Local judges will periodically attend meetings to reinforce the work of the truancy diversion team, and to offer encouragement and recognition to participating students who are making progress.

The Court Designated Worker Program was created in 1986 by legislation enacted by the Kentucky General Assembly, which provided for each of the state's 120 counties to have the services of a court designated worker. Court designated workers are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to process complaints against individuals under the age of 18. The purpose of the Court Designated Worker Program is to serve the best interests of the child and to provide redress for offenses without court action and without the creation of a formal court record.

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